



The Triadic Stool Model

A Framework for Sustainable Peace and State Building

Accountable Governance, Professional Security, and Independent Justice as Interdependent Pillars of Stability

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Abstract

In spite of extensive international intervention, investment and institution-building over several decades, lasting peace continues to be a distant dream for large parts of the world. This paper presents the "Triadic Stool Model" -- a conceptual framework based on the idea that there are three interconnected pillars for building sustainable peace and a functioning state: (1) good Governance and Rule of Law, (2) Security and Justice, and (3) economic foundations and resource management. The model is based on the image of a three-legged stool, which indicates that stability will only occur if all three legs are able to carry equal weights. If one leg of the stool is lengthened, weakened or eliminated, the entire structure will topple. The innovative element of the Triadic Stool Model lies in its emphasis on triadic synchronization. As opposed to hierarchical or sequential progression in the development of governance, security and economic development, the model asserts that governance, security and economic development must progress in relative harmony. Over-investment in security without reforming governance leads to authoritarian stability. Reforming governance without providing economic opportunities results in hollow democracies. Economic growth without a rule of law enables kleptocracy. Each leg of the stool creates virtuous or vicious circles in which either reinforce or undermine each other's ability to promote peace or instability in a country. The framework is tested using five comparative case studies: Somalia, where all three legs of the stool are weak, yet international focus is disproportionately directed towards security; South Sudan, where elite capture has resulted in hollowed-out governance and economics, thus rendering security a means of political dominance; Nigeria, where patronage networks have enabled vast economic resources to be diverted from providing benefit to the majority of Nigerians due to failed governance structures; Afghanistan, where institutions built with external scaffolding fell simultaneously upon withdrawal of external support; and Colombia, where the 2016 peace agreement represents the greatest effort to date in terms of attempting triadic synchronization however implementation gaps remain in rural security and economics threatening the durability of the agreement. In addition to presenting a model of peace building, the paper suggests developing a Triadic Synchronization Index (TSI) designed to measure not just how strong each leg of the stool is independently but also how balanced each leg is. Furthermore, the paper includes a number of early warning signs for potential imbalances between each leg of the stool and an accompanying matrix detailing specific policy recommendations for policymakers, donors and civil society organizations working to establish sustainable peace.

Keywords: *Triadic Stool Model, Sustainable Peace, State Building, Accountable Governance, Professional Security, Independent Justice, Structural Foundation, Triadic Synchronization, Fragile States, Peacebuilding, Conflict Resolution, Equitable Economy, Environmental Sustainability, Natural Resource Management, Policy Framework*

1. Introduction

At the heart of modern peacebuilding exists a quiet paradox. Never has the international community had such great knowledge, such greater resources, nor such institutional capability to address both conflict and fragility. Yet peace, in any durable sense, continues to elude hundreds of million people. The UN has at least a dozen ongoing peacekeeping and political missions. The World Bank invests billions of dollars in fragile states. Regional bodies send military units and mediation teams. Bilateral donor governments provide funding for security sector reforms, judicial training, and economic stabilisation programmes. Still, history repeats itself: ceasefires collapse, elections spark violence, economies enrich those who hold power while ordinary citizens become poorer, and the architects of peace watch as their plans disintegrate.

So why does this continue to happen? It seems that we need not look further than the fractured nature of approach employed by our efforts. The fields of governance, security, and economic development have long existed in separate institutional silos – each with their own rationales, funding mechanisms, and criteria for measuring success as well as their own professional communities. Military specialists construct armies; constitutional advisors write constitutions; economists develop macro-economic frameworks. Generally speaking these professions rarely meet together or work cooperatively to produce joint strategies that take into consideration their interdependencies.

The Triadic Stool Model provides a solution to this problem. Based on the simplicity and power of a three-legged stool analogy, the model holds that sustainable peace can exist only when there are three pillars: Good Governance & Rule of Law; Security & Justice; and Economic Foundations & Resource Management. Similar to a physical stool, stability exists when all three legs are bearing weight equally. If one leg is shorter, weaker or absent then regardless of how sturdy the remaining legs are, the stool will tip over and fall.

The analogical nature of this metaphor allows us to see what more complex theoretical models often fail to demonstrate: the unbreakable interdependence of politics, security and economics. A Government unable to secure its citizens' safety loses credibility. A security apparatus without democratic oversight becomes abusive. An economy without a rule of law becomes a space where individuals are allowed to extract wealth and engage in corrupt practices. These represent not simply technical failures; they represent failures in ethics since they define whether humans have access to safety, dignity and hope.

The paper addresses three core research questions. First, how do governance, security, and economic foundations interact to produce or undermine sustainable peace? Second, what happens when these pillars develop asynchronously, when one leg grows while the others wither? Third, what are the implications of triadic synchronization for policy design, donor programming, and national strategy? To answer these questions, the paper reviews recent scholarship, develops the Triadic Stool Model as a conceptual framework, and tests it against five comparative case studies spanning Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

2. Literature Review

Literature Review. The scholarly and policy literature on state building, peace building, and fragility has dramatically expanded in the past twenty years. But much of it is still organized along disciplinary lines that mimic the institutional silos outlined above. This paper surveys four streams of relevant scholarship and discovers how the Triadic Stool Model fits into this.

2.1 Governance and Legitimacy.

Political order has occupied thinkers for ages since Aristotle, yet recent scholarship has much sharper the debate. In *The Narrow Corridor*, Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) suggest that liberty and prosperity follow only as state capacity and societal mobilization rise in tandem, constituting a “narrow corridor” in which neither the state nor society takes over. This framework explains why so many fragile states pendulum swing back and forth between more autocratic impulse and anarchic implosion: they haven’t discovered the corridor. Fukuyama (2015) identifies the collapse of political order as related to patrimonial capture of institutions, in which elites turn public offices into instruments of private enrichment. His analysis is particularly pertinent for postcolonial states where formal institutions have been grafted onto countries that have already established their informal regimes of governance. Menkhaus (2018) challenges the accepted view that governance includes a competent state and shows how Somali societies have created elaborate forms of “governing without government” through customary law (xeer), clan

mediation and market regulation. This understanding disrupts the state-building agenda to show that legitimacy may reside in bodies that foreign actors do not acknowledge, appreciate or comprehend. A historic World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law by the World Bank pushed this development to the next level, reinterpreting governance more broadly as a power issue and arguing policy failure occurs when it is disconnected from the bargaining dynamics of elites, citizens, and international actors (World Bank, 2017).

2.2 Security Sector Reform and Conflict Dynamics.

The security dimension of state building has seen massive investment, but uneven results. Sedra (2017) offers an extensive review of security sector reform (SSR) programs in various settings which he argues, among others, that many SSR efforts fail because they regard security as a technical problem instead of more overtly political. In Africa, Williams (2018) details the operational and strategic challenges, that are evident in the experiences of AMISOM, and how external military interference can reduce violence, but not the underlying governance and economic causes of conflict. De Waal (2015) defines the "political marketplace" where political loyalty is bought and sold in patronage, violence and rent payment. Security forces are not neutral instruments of the state here; rather, they are active participants in the marketplace, offering protection to the highest bidder. Autesserre (2019) turns the lens inward: International peace building is not the failure of a flawed strategy at headquarters, instead it is the failure of a fundamental disconnect between those international actors and the local communities that they pretend to serve. Her work emphasises the role of local knowledge, local agency and local legitimacy in the security provision.

2.3 Economic Foundations and Resource Conflicts.

Since Collier and Hoeffler (2004)'s seminal analysis on the "greed versus grievance" argument, economics and conflict have been well researched. Building on this, Collier (2015) explores how the wealth available for natural resources creates "conflict traps" in which the revenues meant to pay for development instead pay for war. Homer Dixon (1999) viewed the issue from the vantage point of the environment. Notably he observed that resource scarcity in the form of arable land and fresh water creates social stresses that can lead to violence. Sala i Martin and Subramanian (2013) offered one of the most comprehensive evaluations of the "resource curse" in Nigeria, showing that oil wealth has meant nothing regarding economic development but waste, corruption, and institutional decay. More recently, Maxwell et al. (2022) which, as already described, highlighted the deadly intertwining of conflict, climate change and food insecurity in Somalia, detailing how drought and armed conflict interacted to push communities towards famine. Their work illustrates a key feedback loop: economic vulnerability drives recruitment into armed groups, which drives conflict, which exacerbates economic vulnerability.

2.4 Integrated Frameworks and the Gap.

A number of scholars have made efforts to develop integrated understanding of peace and state building. The liberal peace paradigm has been criticized in Paris's (2004) work for its assumption that accelerated democratization and marketization will lead to stability, and the need for "institutionalization before liberalization". Richmond (2015) also suggested a "post liberal peace" under the idea of taking seriously the agency of local community and acknowledging the shortcomings of externally applied models. Mac Ginty (2011) introduced the notion of "hybrid peace," acknowledging that in practice, peace is always a negotiated resolution between international norms and local conditions. Perhaps the most philosophically profound and aspirational vision, Lederach (1997, 2005) sought a "moral imagination" that might extend beyond the immediate pragmatics of conflict resolution and towards transformative new relationships and reconciled communities. For all of this, there's a serious academic and policy lacuna. Most of the current frameworks either treat governance, security, and economics as different domains that can be dealt with in order, or they favor one domain higher than others. The "security first" school believes there is no safety without security. The "governance first" school holds that the right institutions must have precedence over all else. The "Economics First" school argues development is the best antidote to conflict. The whole truth is missing from each position. This gap is addressed by the Triadic Stool Model, which asserts that all three domains are not sequential but simultaneous, are not individual but rather interrelated, and that the overall strength of any one domain is as important as the strength of the three is relative to one another.

3. Conceptual Framework: The Triadic Stool Model

3.1 Leg One: Accountable and Democratic Governance

The first leg of the Triadic Stool involves the structures and processes that govern decision-making at the collective level, how authority is exercised, and how accountability is implemented. In the context of the Triadic Stool model, accountable and democratic governance should not simply be viewed as being tied to specific formal institutions. It includes the social contract between a government and its citizens; the commonalities that exist among the many different norms governing public life; and those mechanisms that provide checks on power and balance. The key elements of accountable and democratic governance include political settlement arrangements that incorporate diverse groups into the decision-making process; constitutions that set out the "rules of the game"; mechanisms to promote transparency so that citizens may evaluate how authorities exercise public authority; institutionalized forms of local governance that will increase the presence and legitimacy of the state beyond the capital city; avenues for citizen engagement such as public consultation, participatory budgeting and civic education; mechanisms to promote accountability (including independent oversight agencies, free press, civil society); and anti-corruption institutions that limit the ability of individuals to convert public assets to personal wealth. Philosophically speaking, accountable governance relates back to one of the oldest questions posed by philosophers - who rules, and for what purpose? When governance is both representative, transparent and democratically accountable, then it creates legitimacy. Citizens believe the authority of the state is justified, and therefore worthy of their obedience. Democratic participation does not constitute a mere procedural requirement but constitutes the very blood of a state that seeks legitimacy over simple power. However, if governance becomes either extractive, exclusionary or corrupt, legitimacy quickly erodes, and the social contract ceases to function. As Fukuyama (2015) noted, once institutions lose sight of serving the public good and instead become vehicles of elite self-enrichment, the erosion of political stability accelerates. Thus, a stool representing Sustainable Peace (stable, legitimate, just) cannot have a hollowed-out base resulting from the lack of accountability and exclusivity.

3.2 Leg Two: Professional Security

The second leg of the stool focuses on ensuring that there exists professional, disciplined and apolitical security forces capable of providing safe environments for individuals and communities. In addition to addressing the absence of conflict, professional security in the context of the Triadic Stool Model also emphasizes the existence of competent and ethically sound security sectors.

This expanded definition includes national defense forces that protect territorial sovereignty while functioning under civilian control; police forces that maintain public order through professionalism and public trust, as opposed to reliance on force alone; programs focused on reforming security sectors aimed at establishing codes of ethics, merit-based advancement opportunities and performance expectations; civilian oversight functions such as parliamentary defense committees, inspector general's offices, and human rights monitoring agencies; post-conflict DDR programs designed to transform former fighters into members of their respective communities; protection afforded to civilians (with special attention given to women, children and internally displaced persons); and structural mechanisms that require security personnel to account to the citizens they are sworn to protect.

There is a significant distinction between maintaining professional security capabilities versus simply maintaining coercive capacities. While states can utilize repression to create a surface appearance of order (as demonstrated by numerous authoritarian regimes), coercion alone does not result in true long-term stability. Repression typically generates grievances, and grievances ultimately manifest themselves in some form of resistance. Therefore, professional security necessitates that citizens trust those institutions responsible for protecting them. Trust is created when security forces adhere to discipline, fairness and accountability toward each other. When security forces are used as politicized instruments to preserve regime control, the stool teeters precariously, and thus the seat of Sustainable Peace (Stable, Legitimate, Just) can no longer remain stable. Huntington (1957) stated that the professionalization of a military is interdependent with the health of democracy that it is intended to protect.

3.3 Leg Three: Independent Justice

The third leg represents whether or not judicial institutions are free from influence by other factors and are able to uphold the rule of law; whether disputes are resolved fairly; and whether or not those most vulnerable to

abuse receive fair treatment. In terms of independent justice, this means an impartial judiciary which makes decisions independently from political influence or interference, bribery or ethnic bias; a constitutional court which serves as a protector of fundamental rights; equal access to justice for all citizens including poor/rural/marginalized populations through legal assistance/justice delivered in remote locations/simplified procedures; transitional justice mechanisms including truth commissions/reparations programs/criminal accountability processes designed to deal with past violence; customary/traditional justice systems that operate in conjunction with formal courts while observing basic human rights standards; training/judicial capacity development for judges/magistrates/prosecutors to enhance their competence/ethical conduct; and normative anti-impunity requirements that ensure no individual (regardless of position/rank/wealth) is above the law.

Independent justice is not an abstract legal concept. It must reach ordinary people. A judicial system that renders eloquent rulings while leaving the majority unable to access its protections is not just; it is a monument to hypocrisy. The philosopher Amartya Sen (1999) defined development as the expansion of human capabilities, the freedom to live a life one has reason to value, and that freedom is impossible without the assurance that one's rights will be protected by impartial institutions.

As the philosopher Judith Shklar (1990) observed, injustice is not merely the absence of justice; it is a distinct phenomenon with its own dynamics and its own consequences. Transitional justice, in particular, reminds us that societies emerging from conflict cannot simply turn the page; they must read it, reckon with it, and write a new chapter rooted in accountability and truth. Without this leg, the seat of Sustainable Peace (Stable, Legitimate, Just) rests on a void where the cries of the wronged go unheard.

3.4 The Structural Foundation

At the bottom of the three legs of the Triadic Stool exists the foundational structure, the base from which everything is formed. The base is not a leg – it is the platter that enables each leg to have a footing. Each leg represents a component of this platter: Equitable Economy, Environmental Sustainability, and Natural Resource Management. As long as there is not a solidly established structural foundation there will never be firmly standing legs. A judiciary will not provide justice when the population is starving. Professional Security Forces will not be able to enforce law and order when the environment is collapsing. There will not be accountable governments when populations exist in chronic crises.

This foundational aspect is the underlying truth of building a State: prior to asking who will govern, protect and adjudicate we need to ask if people are fed, if their land can support their needs, and if the wealth below the surface of the earth will be distributed equitably among all or if it will create riches for a select few.

Equitable economies produce wealth and distribute it. Public policy should focus on creating jobs – especially for young people – not just generating revenue. Revenue should come from taxes, trade and investments. Social protection programs should help cushion those who are most vulnerable during times of shock. Infrastructure development in transportation, energy, and communication should connect citizens to opportunities.

Environmental sustainability is dependent upon development not consuming the ecosystems that all human life relies on. We must build climate resilient communities; conserve our biodiversity; and manage our lands in ways that ensure sustainability. These requirements are not optional – they are required for achieving stability.

Natural resource management provides for transparency, accountability, and benefit-sharing of oil, minerals, timber, and water so that these resources become blessings to people instead of curses. According to Collier (2015), unmanaged natural resource wealth creates conditions for corruption, violence, and institutional decay instead of prosperity.

From a philosophical perspective, the structural foundation demonstrates that human dignity is indivisible. While one may refer to Sustainable Peace (Stable, Legitimate and Just), we cannot tolerate mass poverty, environmental degradation or allow shared resources to be exploited by small groups of elite individuals.

When we say "justice" we also mean material realities; when we say "aspirations" we mean what ordinary people's experiences reflect every day. If this foundation crumbles, then the stool does not simply start to sway -- it completely falls apart and takes governance, security and justice with it. In ancient wisdom: "a house built on sand will fall", and likewise "a peace built on exploitation and ecological destruction".

3.5 Triadic Synchronization

While other models highlight either the individual components of the Triadic Stool or their relationship to each other, the unique value proposition offered by the Triadic Stool Model is represented by the concept of triadic synchronization. Triadic Synchronization means that each of the three legs must grow at roughly equal rates. The model does not require the legs to grow equally; indeed, complete equality would be impossible to achieve and unnecessary. However, it does advise against extreme imbalances in which one leg grows rapidly beyond the pace of the two other legs while simultaneously growing much slower than both legs. Table 1 presents examples of the effects of such dramatic imbalance.

Accountable Governance	Professional Security	Independent Justice	Resulting Condition	Historical Examples
Strong	Strong	Strong	Sustainable Peace (Stable, Legitimate, Just)	Botswana, Costa Rica, post war Germany
Weak	Strong	Weak	Authoritarian stability / police state	Eritrea, North Korea
Strong	Weak	Weak	Hollow democracy / institutional fragility	Early post conflict Liberia, Timor Leste
Weak	Weak	Strong	Juridical state / enforcement gap	Post transition contexts with strong courts but weak enforcement
Weak	Strong	Strong	Managed autocracy / elite capture	Rwanda, Gulf monarchies
Strong	Strong	Weak	Order without justice / impunity state	Contexts with strong governance and security but compromised judiciary
Strong	Weak	Strong	Prosperous but insecure / ungoverned spaces	Nigeria (select regions), Mexico
Weak	Weak	Weak	State failure / total collapse	Somalia (1991), South Sudan (2013)

Table 1. Triadic imbalance scenarios and their observed outcomes. Note: The Structural Foundation (Equitable Economy, Environmental Sustainability, and Natural Resource Management) is assumed as a constant baseline in this table. Where the foundation itself is weak or absent, all configurations trend toward instability regardless of the strength of individual legs.

3.6 Feedback Loops

A great deal of what happens within each of the three domains of the Triadic Stool model depends upon the quality of the relationships between them. These relationships exist in the form of positive feedback loops (virtuous cycles) where improvements in one area support additional improvement in other areas. Or they may take the form of negative feedback loops (vicious cycles) where problems in one area generate and intensify problems in others. Virtuous cycles are seen when, for example, a stronger judiciary (governance) supports better contract enforcement (economics); this, in turn, attracts investment (economics) and provides the tax base (economics) needed to fund capable and impartial security forces (security) that help ensure safety for all citizens including those working in courts and judicial facilities (governance). Positive feedback-loops create spirals of growing institutional capability and greater citizen confidence. Vicious cycles occur when weaknesses in one domain worsen conditions in other domains. When corruption prevails in governance (such as through bribery and embezzlement) this can divert resources away from investments that would grow productivity and reduce unemployment (economics), increasing

social unrest and encouraging recruitment into armed groups (security), thus reducing both stability and potential for future investment.

Understanding how such relationships work is critical to developing effective policies. To succeed, interventions must either foster positive feedback-loops or stop negative ones. Without attention to the underlying factors driving insecurity, a security-focused intervention could provide only temporary relief. Similarly, without addressing corruption, an economic development project will likely only increase wealth for the elite. As a result of these dynamics, the Triadic Stool model advocates for designing interventions that acknowledge these inter-relationships across domains and target these linkages in addition to each individual leg of the stool.

4. Comparative Case Studies

The following five comparative case study examples illustrate use of the Triadic Stool model in contexts representing different geographic locations, conflict types, and degrees of international involvement. Each case study evaluates the relative health of each leg of the stool and examines how the inter-domain feedback mechanisms reinforce instability or promote stability.

4.1 Somalia: Excessive Investment in Security; Neglect of Foundation Building Governing Institutions.

Somalia's governing institutions remain some of the weakest globally. Despite adopting a provisional federal constitution in 2012 that outlines a new federal system consisting of six regional states, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and regional states continue to have a very contentious relationship. Although clan-based political agreements provide a degree of representation for clans within the country, they do so at the cost of excluding significant segments of society. Additionally, because clan-based settlements often involve negotiations over land, access to natural resources, and influence over local affairs, they often serve to solidify power dynamics. At the same time, judicial systems in much of Somalia are extremely weak due to a lack of funding. Therefore, justice is rarely available outside of Mogadishu. According to Menkhaus (2018), there exists a significant gap in terms of governance capacity across much of Somalia. Consequently, in large parts of the country, governance is delivered primarily via customary law and informal clan mediation processes as opposed to formal state processes. Furthermore, the government's ability to deliver services and exercise jurisdiction is limited primarily to cities and major transportation routes. Based on data from Fund for Peace (2024), Somalia received a ranking of 111.3/120 on the Fragile States Index in 2024. The index evaluated Somalian elites as being highly divided – with a rating of 10/10 -- and found that Somalis had low levels of confidence in their government – rated as 9.7/10.

Security. The security situation is characterized by multiple actors who possess competing mandates and loyalties. The Somali National Army (SNA) continues to face severe challenges related to inadequate pay, poor equipment, and divisions among clan lines. The African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS) is continuing to draw down its military presence pursuant to an agreed-upon timeline that many believe is too early to implement in light of continued threats posed by Al-Shabaab (Williams, 2018; African Union, 2023). Clan militias function as quasi-security organizations in many areas of Somalia, providing community members with protective services since government is unable to provide such services. Al-Shabaab has significantly reduced the amount of territory it controls but continues to possess the ability to commit large-scale violent acts against civilians residing within urban areas. Additionally, Al-Shabaab possesses a well-developed taxation and governance regime in the territories it controls. International donors have invested heavily in security-related expenditures; however, the level of donor funding devoted to governance and economic development programs lags far behind.

Economy/Economic Development. Somalia's economy is extremely vulnerable. Drought events caused by climate change have placed increasing pressure on the livestock industry which comprises about 40% of Somalias' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for nearly all employment opportunities for rural Somalis (Maxwell et al., 2022). Estimated remittance flows into Somalia from the Somali diaspora range from \$1.5 to \$2 billion annually and constitute a larger proportion of the country's total economy than foreign aid or foreign direct investment (World Bank, 2023). Somalia is one of poorest countries globally with GDP per capita estimated at less than \$450. During 2008-2012 Somalia experienced a surge in maritime piracy incidents during which pirate gangs extorted millions of dollars from shipping companies operating in waters adjacent to Somalia. Maritime piracy was perceived

internationally not only as a crime problem but also as a manifestation of desperate economic circumstances faced by coastal communities whose livelihoods were destroyed by collapse of fishing industries and withdrawal of governmental services.

4.2 Liberia: Overemphasis on Governance; Neglect of Economic Growth and Social Stability Governing Institutions. Liberian governing institutions were severely weakened during the civil war that lasted from 1989 until 1996. Since then, efforts have been made to establish a more stable foundation for governance. In particular, post-conflict reconstruction efforts focused primarily on rebuilding governing institutions -- including a national electoral commission and national police force -- and establishing rule-of-law institutions. However, despite considerable progress having been made toward improving governance institutions, Liberia remains a fragile state due to deep-seated historical structural issues -- particularly related to pervasive inequality and social marginalization -- that hinder effective delivery of government services and undermine trust in government institutions. The World Bank noted that "the challenge facing Liberia today is not simply building institutions but creating inclusive institutions that reflect the needs and aspirations of Liberians" (World Bank, 2017). According to data from Fund for Peace (2024), Liberia scored a total of 62.1/120 on the Fragile States Index in 2024 with respect to factionalized elites and state legitimacy -- scoring 4.8/10 on factionalized elites and 6.6/10 on state legitimacy.

Security. After the end of the civil war in 1996, a relatively stable security environment developed in Liberia for several years. However, following Charles Taylor's forced exile in August 2003, instability returned to Liberia as rival factions began fighting over control of the capital city Monrovia and surrounding areas. Following an intervention led by ECOWAS peacekeepers in July 2003 followed by UN peacekeeping forces later that year, relative stability returned quickly and remained in place throughout President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's two terms in office (2006-2018). Nonetheless, during her presidency, Liberia continued to experience numerous challenges related to security -- particularly related to border incursions by armed groups from neighboring Côte d'Ivoire -- as well as significant gaps in security infrastructure -- particularly with regard to border patrol capabilities and intelligence gathering capacity. While President George Weah has attempted to reform Liberia's security sector, he has yet to make significant strides in this effort. Liberia's rank on the Fragile States Index rose slightly during his first term -- from 59.7/120 in 2018 to 63.1/120 in 2024 according to data provided by Fund for Peace (2024).

Economy/Economic Development. Prior to civil war, Liberia was considered one of Africa's more prosperous economies due to its significant natural resource wealth including rubber plantations, iron ore mines, timber reserves, and mineral deposits including diamonds, gold and cobalt. Unfortunately, civil war resulted in widespread destruction of physical infrastructure -- including roads, bridges, schools and healthcare facilities -- which devastated the economy. Additionally, during Taylor's presidency beginning in 1997, massive amounts of money generated by exportation of timber were laundered into Liberian banks via shell companies controlled by Taylor's associates resulting in enormous illicit financial flows. The Ebola outbreak that occurred between 2014 and 2016 served to exacerbate these problems further by causing economic contraction of roughly 20% over the course of two years -- with subsequent decline in economic activity extending into years after recovery from Ebola was achieved. According to estimates by IMF staff economists in May 2018 -- prior to receipt of U.S.-based concessionary financing -- Liberia was expected to require nearly four decades to recover from losses associated with Ebola alone assuming no additional shocks occur during that time period.

Triadic Assessment.

Three legs of the Somalia's stool are equally unstable; however, a significant unbalance exists due to a substantial disparity in international interest/funding for Security over Governance and Economic Foundation Building.

While costs for ATMIS have been in the Billions of Dollars, investments in Judicial Capacity/Constitutional Finalization/Local Governance/Economic Diversification have been relatively minor. It is apparent that a Vicious Cycle exists; weak governance impairs economic management, poor economic conditions fuel poverty, poverty drives recruitment into Al Shabaab, recruitment into Al Shabaab requires additional security expenditures, additional security expenditures crowd out both legitimate governance development and legitimate economic opportunities. Breaking this vicious cycle will require the rebalance of the Somalia Development Portfolio from one focused on

building Security through an emphasis on developing Governance Legitimacy and providing Economic Opportunities.

4.3 South Sudan: Elite Capture of All Three Governance, Security & Economic Leg's.

The Government of South Sudan was formed after the independence in 2011 with an agreement that would allow military leaders to make deals with each other. In 2018, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) created a Transitional Government of National Unity. However, this transition has been repeatedly put-off. Originally scheduled presidential and legislative elections were rescheduled multiple times, most recently to Dec. 2026 (International Crisis Group, 2023). The Constitution of South Sudan is still considered to be in a transitional state, and therefore real federalism has not been enacted yet. Instead of giving power to civil society and/or regular people, the agreement creates a deal-making system for military commanders/political elites. Rolandsen (2021) says, political power in South Sudan is derived from controlling armed forces and having access to oil revenue, NOT through public support or institutional capacity.

The Security Sector in South Sudan does not exist as a professional, national force, but rather as a group of factional forces loosely bound together under the same name (e.g., SPLA/South Sudan People's Defense Force – SSPDF). Since independence, the SPLA/SSPDF has split into two major groups – primarily Dinka and Nuer – along ethnic lines. According to De Waal (2015), South Sudan can best be described as a “marketplace” where military commanders act like politicians trading loyalty for resource-based rewards. UNMISS has had a Protection of Civilians mandate in South Sudan since 2007 and has had difficulty preventing inter-communal violence within some states (Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states). Both civilian casualties and sexual violence continue to be common. Approximately 2.2 million South Sudanese are currently living as refugees outside their home country, while another 2.0 million are IDPs inside their own nation (UNHCR, 2024).

The Economy of South Sudan is largely reliant upon oil, which generates about 98% of the government's annual budget and about 80% of its GDP. This reliance on oil makes the economy extremely susceptible to the volatility in global oil prices, pipeline closures due to conflicts or natural disasters, and conflicts-driven shutdowns of pipelines. When the conflict began in April 2023 in neighboring Sudan, it caused additional disruption to oil shipments via pipeline across Sudanese territory causing even greater financial pressure on the already financially distressed South Sudan. With a GDP per capita of around \$369 (nominal), it is one of the poorer countries in the world. As stated earlier, over 75% of the population live below the poverty line and continues to rank nearly last in Human Development Index at .388 in 2023 (UNDP, 2024). Billions of dollars generated from oil sales have been stolen by corrupt officials using off-budget security spending and patronage payments.

Triad Assessment:

In South Sudan all three legs have been captured by military and political elites who utilize governance structures to legitimate their power, security forces to protect it, and oil revenues to fund it. The triad is not simply weak; it has actually been used for their benefit. The economic leg functions mainly as a rent-extraction mechanism rather than an infrastructure to promote large-scale development opportunities. The governance leg provides a thin layer of institutional legitimacy without providing any form of accountability. The security leg serves the interest of elite groups instead of protecting civilians. While there may be several weaknesses throughout the legs of the triad, none compare to the complete domination of all three legs by a small group of elites. A drastic change will need to occur within the current political arrangement if a new cycle is to begin, which includes true power-sharing agreements, security sector reforms with actual unification of various factional forces, and clear transparency with respect to managing oil revenues.

4.4 Nigeria: Abundance Without Equity

The three aspects of the Triad -- Governance, Economics and Security -- illustrate a distinct type of Triad Imbalance. The Economic Leg of the Triad can generate a tremendous amount of revenue. However, these revenues are diverted via Patronage Networks and corruption away from Public Goods.

Governance.

On the surface, Nigeria's system of governance is a very good example of a federal democracy. It is structured as a federal republic made up of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Therefore, Nigeria has a similar governmental structure to the United States. However, although Nigeria's system of governance is structured similarly to the U.S., it operates quite differently. In other words, even though Nigeria's system of governance is structured similarly to the U.S. in that it has an independent judicial branch, two legislative branches and competitive multi-party elections; in reality, it is heavily influenced by political elites and patronage systems. As such, Suberu (2019) describes Nigeria's system of governance as operating within the "fiscal federalism" framework, where the central government distributes oil money to each state, thus encouraging competition among states for this money rather than creating their own individual revenue streams. Furthermore, electoral manipulation continues to be a major problem in Nigeria, with many believing that the election process was manipulated during the 2023 general election due to problems with the electronic transmittal of voting results. Nigeria scores poorly in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index ranking it in the lowest quarter of countries globally for the past several years. For example, in 2023 Nigeria scored 25/100 on the index, indicating widespread corruption throughout Nigeria's government (Transparency International, 2024). Olatunji and Osulale (2025) note that institutional weaknesses create conditions in which elite impunity can flourish and further erode citizens' confidence in democratic institutions.

Security.

Nigeria faces numerous unique and interconnected security challenges. In the northeast region of Nigeria there is ongoing violence perpetrated by the Boko Haram terrorist group and its offshoot ISWAP. This violence includes attacks against both military personnel and civilians. In addition, bandits and mass kidnappings have taken place in the northwestern region of Nigeria. Some analysts argue that this crisis may be worse in terms of numbers killed and displaced than the Boko Haram crisis. Farmer-herder conflict has also increased in the middle belt region. These conflicts are primarily driven by competition for land and water between Fulani pastoralists who are primarily Muslim and settled farmers who are often Christian or animist. In addition, climate change and rapid population growth are contributing factors to these increasing tensions. The southeast region of Nigeria has experienced periodic protests and subsequent crackdowns by the Nigerian authorities related to the separatist movement of IPOB.

While Nigeria's security services are numerous they are generally seen as being excessively violent, prone to committing extrajudicial killings, and largely unaccountable. (See ICG 2022.) A significant amount of funding is allocated for security purposes, but this funding does little to address the root causes of insecurity due to systemic corruption, interagency inefficiencies and the reactive nature of Nigeria's security response.

Economics.

Although Nigeria is Africa's largest economy based on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the largest oil-producing nation in Africa, Nigeria's economic development indicators paint a starkly different picture. Since the early 1970s oil has dominated Nigeria's economy and accounted for nearly 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings as well as approximately 50% of Nigeria's government revenue over the last few decades. As such, Nigeria exhibits characteristics consistent with the "resource curse." Specifically, oil wealth has resulted in deindustrialization, extreme inequality and a failure to invest sufficiently in agriculture, manufacturing and human capital. According to World Bank estimates (2023), approximately 87 million Nigerians live below the international poverty line and an additional 38.9% of Nigerians lived below the poverty line in 2023. While the national average Gini Coefficient is 33.9 (2022) regional differences are substantial. Poverty rates are significantly higher in the north-eastern and north-western regions of Nigeria compared to southern Nigeria. Additionally, youth unemployment is estimated at greater than 40%, providing a large pool of grievances/vulnerability to recruitment by armed groups.

Triadic Assessment

Nigeria represents a distinct form of triadic imbalance. The economic leg provides large sums of revenue; however, this revenue is diverted from public goods creation through patronage networks/corruption enabled/guaranteed by governance structures. Rather than governing through checks-and-balances mechanisms, governance structures facilitate this diversion through a system of fiscal federalism that rewards loyalty over performance. Similarly, Nigeria's security responses are almost exclusively reactive/militaristic, treating symptoms rather than the underlying structural issues in governance/economy that cause these symptoms. Therefore, the most significant

imbalance exists between Nigeria's large economic potential and its limited ability to utilize this potential equitably through reforms in governance and security practices.

4.4 Afghanistan: The Collapse of Externally Scaffolded Legs

Governance.

The Afghan Republic (2001-2021) was arguably the greatest attempt at building states through external support since the end of colonialism. It had established a Constitution in 2004 creating a republican system of government, providing for free and fair presidential elections, ensuring the independence of judges and a judicial process and protecting the rights of citizens. However, there was an enormous difference between the aspirations contained in the Constitution and the realities of daily life. The corruption affected all levels of government: the Provincial Governors had bought their jobs and customs officers diverted all the import duty monies to themselves. SIGAR (2021) demonstrated in great detail how the international community wasted, stole or diverted a very large part of the \$145 Billion that went into rebuilding Afghanistan. Although the Afghan Democratic System did provide some elements of democracy such as the election of members to Parliament and the President, these institutions had no deep roots in Afghan Society, in which authority was generally exercised by tribal elder, religious leader or local commander, not through elections and constitutions. Harpviken (2025) argued that the failure of the Government to create good governance was largely due to the fact that it was created from the outside not inside, so it remained reliant on International Political Will and Financial Support that eventually ran out.

Military / Security.

The Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), created and funded by the U.S. and its allies at a cost estimated to be greater than \$90 billion over two decades, collapsed with incredible rapidity in August 2021. The speed with which the ANDSF collapsed, and the Taliban took control of all 34 provinces in less than 10 days, highlighted just how dependent the ANDSF's security architecture was on foreign support -- particularly airpower, logistical supply chains, intelligence collection and contractor-maintained equipment. Zyla (2025) identified significant vulnerabilities in the ANDSF's capabilities that were masked by apparent strength: 'ghost' soldiers being paid but not actually present in units; units that could not function independently of coalition airpower; and an internal command structure that was divided along ethnic and factional lines. The Taliban's resurgence was not simply a military issue -- it was also an issue related to governance. While in the areas they controlled during the insurgency, the Taliban provided rapidly delivered and predictable (if brutal) justice, conflict resolution services and taxation -- services that were frequently unavailable in those same regions from the Afghan State (Barfield, 2022).

Economy.

Under the Republic, Afghanistan's economy relied heavily on international aid which comprised about 75% of public spending and 45% of GDP. Upon the Taliban taking control of Afghanistan and most international funding ceased and nearly \$9 billion in Afghan Central Bank Reserves were frozen, Afghanistan's economy declined by almost 20% in 2021 alone with an accumulated decline of 30 to 35% by mid 2022 (World Bank, 2022). The Opium Economy -- a formally forbidden sector by the international community -- turned out to be far more resilient than the formal economy intended to replace it. With poverty increasing significantly with more than two-thirds of Afghan Households unable to meet even basic needs -- the post 2021 economy has reached a low-level-equilibrium according to the World Bank with limited economic activity, widespread poverty and no prospects for increases in per-capita-income.

Triadic Assessment.

The collapse of Afghanistan provides perhaps the strongest example yet of what this book identifies as the central hazard of the Triadic Stool Model: when the legs of a triad are propped up from outside rather than rooted from within, they will fall off when their supports are withdrawn. Each leg of the triad (governance, security and economics) was substantially supported by international sources and will. Once international support began to fade away, each of the three legs fell simultaneously. This does not mean that external support is always unneeded -- it means that external support can only succeed if it fosters local ownership, local legitimacy and local capability rather than replacing them.

4.5 Colombia: The Most Ambitious Attempt at Synchronization

Governance. The 2016 Final Agreement between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) was likely the most comprehensive peace agreement in modern history. In addition to halting violence, it addressed the underlying issues leading to violence such as rural inequality, political exclusion, illegal drug production and trade, victim's rights and transitional justice.

The Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), which was established under the agreement, represents one of the most unique transitional justice institutions to be developed. While the JEP provides criminal accountability for crimes committed during the armed conflict, it also provides for truth-telling, reparations and restorative justice. Furthermore, the agreement includes provisions related to future political participation by members of the FARC, reserved congressional seats and the establishment of Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PDETs) to support 170 municipalities that were the most impacted by the conflict. As of the end of the seventh year of implementation, according to the Kroc Institute's eighth comprehensive report, 32% of the agreements 578 stipulations have been completely fulfilled; 19% are partially completed; 39% have seen limited completion and 10% have started (Kroc Institute, 2024).

Security. The success of the FARC disarmament represents one of the most successful demobilizations in recent history with over 13,000 ex-combatants disarming. However, as the FARC departed, there has been an increase in insecurity throughout much of Colombia as FARC dissident factions, the National Liberation Army (ELN) and other organized crime groups have taken advantage of the void left by the FARC. Similarly, coca leaf cultivation, which the agreement aimed to reduce through voluntary crop substitution programs, has experienced fluctuations in different areas. Although the Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos Ilícitos (PNIS) has registered over a million families to participate in its voluntary substitution program, the rate of enrollment has been slow and funding has been inadequate. Additionally, there continue to be extremely high levels of violent attacks against social movement leaders, human rights defenders and former FARC fighters resulting in hundreds being murdered since the signing of the agreement (Atlantic Council, 2024). While there has been generally positive reintegration results in terms of reducing mass returns to arms, reintegration efforts face continued challenges in regard to economic sustainability and social acceptance.

Economic. The Colombian agreement has two main components related to economics: a transformational rural reform agenda (Point 1); however, it is also considered the least implemented aspect of the agreement. This point calls for an overhaul of rural Colombia through land reform, agriculture investments, infrastructure improvements and increased access to social services for historically excluded populations. However, as noted previously, Point 1 on Integral Rural Reform is one of the least implemented aspects of the agreement (Kroc Institute, 2024). With a Gini coefficient of 54.4 in 2024 representing some of the greatest inequities in income distribution in Latin America, differences between urban and rural areas of Colombia remain extreme. Environmental concerns associated with economic activities in Colombia such as deforestation, illegal mining and climate-related vulnerabilities create additional complexities (UNDP, 2023).

Triadic Assessment

Colombia is also considered to have made the most advances toward triadically synchronized governance compared to any of the five case studies included in this study. Governance is well established due to strong commitment to implementing elements of the peace accord through a variety of institutional reforms primarily represented by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP) transitional justice institution. Security has improved significantly as a result of achieving a historic disarmament of over 13,000 ex-FARC fighters; however, challenges persist from dissidents groups within Colombia as well as from neighboring countries (such as Venezuela and Ecuador) from remnants of the ELN and numerous organized crime groups. Economic development appears to be progressing at a slower pace than either governance or security with perhaps little exception to rural development initiatives. Specifically rural reform continues to lag behind. The primary concern is that if a large enough disparity develops between what is accomplished in terms of governance relative to economic development, that will undermine public support for peace and create opportunities for those who may oppose parts of or all of the final agreement.

4.6 Comparative Summary

Country	Governance	Security	Economics	Primary Imbalance	FSI Score (2024)
Somalia	Weak	Weak	Weak	Disproportionate security investment; governance and economic foundations neglected	111.3
South Sudan	Weak	Weak	Weak	Comprehensive elite capture across all three legs; oil rents finance patronage	109.0
Nigeria	Moderate	Weak	Moderate	Economic abundance subverted by governance failures and patronage	96.6
Afghanistan	Weak	Weak	Weak	Externally scaffolded legs collapsed simultaneously upon withdrawal	103.9
Colombia	Moderate to Strong	Moderate	Moderate	Governance leg (peace accord) leads; economic and security legs lag in rural areas	75.6

Table 2. Comparative triadic assessment of five case study countries. FSI = Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace, 2024). Scale: 0 (least fragile) to 120 (most fragile).

5. Policy and Programmatic Recommendations

The Triadic Stool model will provide guidelines for how different types of actors (governments, civil society organizations, etc.) need to act to achieve peace. The main point here is that achieving peace requires investment in the three areas of governance, security, and economy at the same time. Actors who try to do this sequentially or in separate ways will probably fail.

5.1. For International Organizations

International organizations (the United Nations, World Bank, African Union, regional organizations) need to develop integrated programming frameworks that include all three areas of governance, security, and economy. This approach has been less successful in the past because most international organizations have adopted a "security first" approach. They start with providing security and then turn to building governance and providing economic opportunities when the security situation is stable enough. However, security will never be stable if there is no good governance and people do not have economic opportunities. Therefore, the international community needs to support countries that work towards peace by developing and implementing coordinated policies across the political, security and development dimensions. Furthermore, international organizations need to increase their ability to support local legitimacy by supporting hybrid forms of governance. Hybrid forms of governance combine existing customary institutions with new ones developed with the help of external partners.

5.2. For National Governments

National governments in fragile and conflict-affected states need to focus on creating inclusive political settlements where all relevant stakeholders are included in the decision-making process. Inclusive political settlements involve bringing together a variety of stakeholders such as women, youth, minority groups and ex-combatants. In contrast, exclusive political settlements favor certain groups and exclude others. Exclusive political settlements may lead to some degree of stability in the short run but usually create conditions for renewed conflict in the longer term. National governments need to carry out security sector reforms that guarantee accountability of security forces via parliamentary control, independent inspections and human rights monitoring. If security forces are allowed to function outside of any form of accountability they often become predatory and undermine the legitimacy that they were intended to secure. Finally, national governments need to implement economic policies that promote diversified economies beyond reliance on natural resources; distribute revenue fairly among regions

and communities; and promote investment in productive sectors (such as agriculture and small enterprises) that provide employment for the largest number of citizens.

5.3. For Donors

Donor governments and multilateral development banks should apply triadic assessment tools to measure whether they have invested sufficiently in the three areas of governance, security and economics. Many donors continue to allocate far greater amounts of money to security-related activities than to governance- and economic-related activities in fragile and conflict-affected countries. Donors should therefore pledge to fund governance- and economic-related programs at least at the same levels as they now fund security-related programs. In addition, donor agencies need to change the way they finance projects so that funding is available for long-term institutional development rather than just for short-term project-based interventions. Research from Colombia shows that lasting peace requires long-term investments over periods of 15-20 years. Finally, donor agencies should invest in monitoring and evaluation systems that assess the overall triadic balance rather than focusing separately on each area (e.g., assessing progress in improving governance separately from assessing improvements in reducing crime).

5.4. For Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in monitoring triadic balance, promoting accountability and facilitating communication between government institutions and citizens. Civil society organizations can monitor developments early on and signal potential problems before they lead to instability. Additionally, they can hold both governments and international organizations accountable for fulfilling their commitments in the three areas. Finally, they can bridge gaps between state institutions and citizens by helping translate policy into practical action and vice versa.

5.5 Recommendation Matrix

Actor	Recommended Action	Timeframe	Expected Impact
International Organizations	Adopt integrated mission mandates addressing all three legs	Short term (1 to 2 years)	Improved coordination; reduced duplication; holistic strategy
International Organizations	Support hybrid governance models grounded in local legitimacy	Medium term (3 to 5 years)	Greater community ownership; reduced dependency on external models
National Governments	Establish inclusive political settlements with diverse participation	Short term (1 to 3 years)	Enhanced legitimacy; reduced exclusion driven grievance
National Governments	Implement security sector accountability mechanisms	Medium term (3 to 5 years)	Professional security forces; reduced civilian harm; increased trust
National Governments	Diversify economies beyond natural resource dependence	Long term (5 to 15 years)	Resilient revenue base; broad based employment; reduced resource curse dynamics
Donors	Balance portfolios across governance, security, and economics	Short term (1 to 2 years)	More sustainable investment; reduced distortion from security dominance
Donors	Shift from project cycles to long term institutional commitments	Medium term (3 to 5 years)	Sustained capacity development; reduced boom bust aid cycles
Civil Society	Monitor triadic balance and publish independent assessments	Ongoing	Accountability; early warning; informed public discourse
Civil Society	Build cross sectoral coalitions across governance, security, and economics	Medium term (2 to 4 years)	Integrated advocacy; breaking down thematic silos

Table 3. Policy recommendation matrix organized by actor, action, timeframe, and expected impact.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework: The Triadic Synchronization Index

This article argues for a Triadic Synchronization Index (TSI) as a method of developing an index for the Triadic Stool Model. This composite index will provide a method of evaluating the balance between the strengths of the three legs of the stool, not just the strength of each individual leg. The authors believe that countries with moderate ratings on all three dimensions are likely to be less unstable than those which are extremely strong in one dimension but weak in another. Rather than the absolute strength or weakness of the legs being indicative of stability, extreme imbalances in the relative strength of the legs are the best predictors of instability.

The TSI will be developed through two steps. Each leg will first be rated from 0 to 100 based on a selection of existing measures. Next, a synchronization score will be generated through calculating the variance of each leg's rating; the closer the variance is to zero, the better balanced the three legs are, and thus the more stable according to the model. Ideally, if a country was totally synchronized, it would receive the same ratings on all three legs of the stool; conversely, if a country were significantly desynchronized, its ratings would vary greatly among the three legs.

Leg	Indicator	Source
Governance	Rule of Law Index score	World Justice Project
Governance	Corruption Perceptions Index score	Transparency International
Governance	Judicial independence rating	V Dem Institute
Governance	Voter participation rate	IDEA International
Governance	Civil liberties score	Freedom House
Security	Intentional homicide rate per 100,000	UNODC
Security	Security force accountability index	V Dem Institute
Security	Civilian casualties from conflict	ACLED / Uppsala Conflict Data Program
Security	Small arms proliferation estimate	Small Arms Survey
Security	Presence and strength of non state armed groups	ACLED / ICG
Economics	GDP per capita (PPP adjusted)	World Bank
Economics	Gini coefficient	World Bank
Economics	Unemployment rate (total and youth)	ILO / World Bank
Economics	Natural resource revenue transparency (EITI compliance)	EITI International Secretariat
Economics	Social protection coverage (% of population)	ILO / World Bank

Table 4. Proposed indicators for the Triadic Synchronization Index by leg and data source.

The TSI should be reviewed and revised every year, in addition to being incorporated into a larger evaluation context with other measures of governance (e.g. the Fragile States Index, the Ibrahim Index of African Governance, and the World Banks Country Policy and Institutional Assessment). It is the unique focus on balance which allows the TSI to act as an indicator of dangerous imbalances in a nation, not simply where it is weakest. Policymakers can utilize the TSI to determine what nations are likely to experience instability through triadic desynchronization and develop targeted policy interventions designed to correct the imbalance that is creating this instability, instead of employing one-size-fits-all approaches.

7. Early Warning Indicators

The Triadic Stool Model generates a set of early warning indicators that can alert analysts, policymakers, and civil society to emerging risks of instability. These indicators are organized by leg and supplemented by cross cutting synchronization warnings.

7.1 Governance Warning Signs

- Constitutional crises, including executive attempts to extend term limits or suspend judicial review
- Electoral manipulation, including voter suppression, exclusion of opposition candidates, and refusal to accept results
- Judicial capture, including appointment of partisan judges, interference with independent investigations, and selective prosecution
- Shrinking civic space, including restrictions on media freedom, civil society registration, and freedom of assembly
- Proliferation of informal or parallel governance structures that compete with or replace state authority

7.2 Security Warning Signs

- Proliferation of non-state armed groups, including militias, vigilante organizations, and armed criminal enterprises
- Fragmentation of national security forces along ethnic, factional, or political lines
- Rising civilian casualties from state security operations, indicating loss of restraint and accountability
- Cross border arms flows and trafficking in military grade weapons
- Increased frequency and lethality of terrorist attacks or insurgent operations

7.3 Economic Warning Signs

- Sudden collapse in government revenue, particularly from a dominant export commodity
- Elite capture of natural resource revenues, evidenced by discrepancies between production data and public accounts
- Spikes in youth unemployment, particularly among educated youth whose expectations exceed available opportunities
- Food insecurity reaching emergency or crisis levels (IPC Phase 3 or above) across multiple regions
- Currency instability, rapid inflation, or dollarization of the economy indicating loss of monetary sovereignty

7.4 Synchronization Warning Signs

- Growing divergence between legs: security spending rising sharply while governance and economic indicators decline
- Donor portfolios becoming increasingly concentrated in one domain at the expense of others
- Government rhetoric emphasizing one leg (typically security) while neglecting commitments in governance and economics
- Public opinion surveys indicating declining trust in state institutions despite increased security expenditure
- International reports documenting progress in one domain alongside deterioration in others

These warning signs should be monitored continuously using a combination of quantitative data (ACLED conflict events, economic statistics, governance indices) and qualitative analysis (field reporting, civil society assessments, media monitoring). The purpose of early warning is not prediction with certainty but the identification of patterns that warrant attention and response before they escalate into crisis.

8. Limitations and Future Research

The Triadic Stool Model, such as all conceptual models of reality, is an oversimplification of complex realities. Therefore, several limitations should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the model categorizes a vast array of events into three distinct categories, and therefore reasonable analysts may differ on where certain events fall. Transitional justice, for instance, includes aspects of accountability for violence (security), institutional design (governance) and reparations (economics). Although the model's categories are analytically beneficial, there will always be an element of artificiality associated with them.

Secondly, the model fails to consider many of the cultural, religious and identity related dimensions that significantly impact how peace and conflict occur. For example, ethnicity, sectarianism and cultural values influence how we understand governance, experience security and distribute economic opportunities. Future versions of the model could explore the inclusion of these dimensions as cross-cutting elements that affect all three legs rather than as a fourth element.

Finally, data collection and availability in fragile states creates significant obstacles in creating measurable indicators for the Triadic Synchronization Index. A number of the proposed indicators rely upon data that is either incomplete, dated or of questionable quality in the very environments where the model is likely to be most effective. Data collection methodologies such as proxy indicators, satellite imaging, mobile phone surveying and crowdsourced conflict reporting could supplement traditional data collection methods.

Research regarding the triadic synchronization model should investigate several areas. Quantitatively evaluating triadic synchronization utilizing panel data across a large sample of fragile and conflict-affected states would provide empirical evidence supporting or opposing the central thesis of the model that "balance" is just as important as "levels." Analysis at subnational levels of governments - for example examining the provincial or district levels within countries - would highlight the spatial variability in fragility that national-level analyses obscure. Incorporating gender and youth dimensions into future research would enhance both the analytical and policy-relevant nature of the model since women and youth are often disproportionately affected by fragility and are also frequently excluded from peace-building processes. Lastly, the increasing need to address climate change and environmental degradation creates questions regarding if environmental resiliency constitutes a possible additional leg or whether it can be viewed as a cross-cutting factor that affects pressure on all three legs.

9. Conclusion

Peace is not one-time achievement but ongoing process. Peace is not a final destination but rather a continued journey. The Triadic Stool Model provides a method of understanding this journey that is at once simplistic enough to communicate yet sophisticated enough to be useful. The central lesson learned from this model is that governance, security, and economic development are not separate problems to solve sequentially but rather interdependent aspects of one larger problem. If they do not move forward together in some form of equilibrium then they will undermine each other. While this concept is not new in theoretical terms; researchers and practitioners alike have long acknowledged the interconnectedness of politics, security and economics. However, the Triadic Stool Model provides analytical structure and practical applications to this theoretical concept.

The five case studies analyzed throughout this study represent diverse forms of conflict across three continents and demonstrate both the usefulness and limitations of the Triadic Stool Model. In Somalia, excessive investment in security has failed to yield stability due to inadequate focus on governance and economic development. In South Sudan, elite capture has used all three legs of the stool to further their own interests while providing little benefit to society. In Nigeria, high levels of wealth exist alongside poverty and insecurity resulting from failures in governance preventing equitable distribution of resources and accountable security measures. In Afghanistan, when external support was removed from all three legs of the stool previously supported by foreign aid, collapse occurred simultaneously. These findings illustrate the necessity of local ownership in achieving sustainable solutions. In Colombia, the largest effort thus far at attempting triadic synchronization through a broad-based peace agreement faces the possibility that gaps in implementation of economics and security will undermine gains made in governance.

Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas stated that ethics begins with recognizing another person - the face of a stranger calling us to responsibility. Peace building at its highest level represents that call to responsibility - the willingness to establish conditions under which all human beings regardless of their position or interests in society

may live with dignity, safety and hope. The Triadic Stool Model is provided in this spirit - as a resource for those who reject fragility as unavoidable and those who recognize the quality of our response to human suffering reflects our collective humanity.

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11. Annex: Data Sources and Methodology

11.1 Data Sources

The research uses both qualitative and quantitative data sources to investigate all three parts of the Triadic Stool model in all five case-study countries.

Principal data source types include:

- **Fragile State Index (FSI):** Annually published by the Fund for Peace, this index assesses 12 different indicators of country vulnerability, such as Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, Group Grievances, Economic Decline, Legitimacy of Government, Public Services, Human Rights and others. Overall fragility assessments, and trend analysis over time, have been completed.
- **World Bank Development Indicators:** The World Bank's development indicator database includes data on GDP per capita, Poverty Rates, Gini Coefficient, Expenditure and Revenue Composition of Governments, Social Indicators etc., to support the evaluation of the economic part of the model.
- **Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI):** The CPI measures perceived levels of corruption in governments and institutions, based upon information collected through business surveys and professional opinions. The results are ranked on an index scale to reflect how corrupt the perceived system of governance is in each country. Governance Quality is evaluated.
- **Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) & Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED):** Both of these datasets provide conflict event data. They also contain geospatially located information regarding conflict incidents and their intensity. These databases are used to evaluate the security part of the model and to identify changes in violent behavior.
- **Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI):** EITI data provides information regarding Natural Resource Management. Specifically, it contains the volume of natural resources extracted, the amount received by government from extraction activities and the payment made by companies for the extraction rights. Evaluating the natural resource governance aspects of the economic part of the model has been completed.
- **Kroc Institute Peace Accords Matrix (PAM):** The PAM provides one of the best available sets of data regarding the implementation of peace accords globally. As such, it was used to evaluate both the governance and security components of the model for the Colombia case.
- **V-Dem Institute:** The Varieties of Democracy project has developed numerous democracy related indexes. Some of these indexes measure democratic qualities such as Judicial Independence, Media Freedom, Civil Society Participation and Security Force Accountability. Additionally, they were used to evaluate governance quality.
- **Freedom House:** Each year, Freedom House publishes the "Freedom in the World" report. In addition to providing information regarding political rights and civil liberties, this report provides two combined ratings for each country -- Political Rights and Civil Liberties -- to assist in evaluating governance quality.

11.2 Comparative Case-Study Research Design

A comparative case study design is used to apply the Triadic Stool Model as a conceptual framework for analyzing the five countries included in this study. A major advantage of this design is that it allows researchers to select countries that vary along many relevant factors. Such factors include geographic region (East Africa; West Africa; South Asia; Latin America), Type of Conflict (Civil War; Insurgency; State Fragility; Negotiated Settlement), Level of International Engagement (High; Moderate) and Stage of Peace Process (Active Conflict; Post-Conflict Transition; Implementation). For each country, each leg of the Triadic Stool Model is evaluated using available Quantitative Data Sources and Qualitative Evidence from Peer Reviewed Scholarships, Policy Reports and Institutional Assessments. In addition to identifying similarities across cases that illustrate the mechanisms of triadic synchronization and desynchronization, the comparative aspect of this study highlights differences among cases.

11.3 Limitations Due to Missing Data and Proxies Used

In general, there is a significant lack of reliable data in fragile states. To address missing data issues several approaches have been taken. When official crime statistics are unreliable or unavailable ACLED conflict event data is used as a surrogate indicator of performance by security sectors. Similarly, when other data exists regarding governance quality but not in terms of Rule-of-Law or Independent Judiciary, then the Component Indicators of the FSI are used as surrogates. Household surveys conducted sporadically by World Bank are supplemented with more recent poverty estimates by IMF and National Statistical Offices when possible. Industry Estimates were utilized for remittances sent into Somalia due to informal nature of money transfer systems. Researchers have attempted to be transparent regarding strengths/weaknesses associated with each assessment. Future efforts to develop the Triadic Synchronization Index should involve developing innovative means of collecting data. Examples would include Satellite-based Economic Activity Indicators, Mobile Phone Surveys capable of reaching populations in remote locations where traditional enumerators cannot access them and Crowdsourcing Conflict Monitoring utilizing platforms such as Ushahidi. Using a combination of traditional and new data sources will improve empirical basis for the Triadic Stool Model thereby increasing its usefulness as a Tool for Practical Policy Making and Programming.

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